



## THE PHYSICIAN'S *Bookshelf*

**PRE-EMPLOYMENT DISABILITY EVALUATION** — William A. Kellogg, M.D., F.A.C.S., formerly associated with the Medical Dept., Douglas Aircraft Co., Inc., Long Beach, California Division; Clinical Professor of Surgery, New York Polyclinic Post-Graduate Medical School; Assistant attending Surgeon, Bellevue, Broad St., Gouvener, and Polyclinic Hospitals, New York, N. Y. Preface by H. L. Herschensohn, M.D. Published Nov. 25, 1957, by Charles C. Thomas, 301-327 E. Lawrence Ave., Springfield, Ill. 155 pages, \$10.50.

The author has written a comprehensive guide which aims and, to a great extent, succeeds in providing a key to an applicant's employability. The book begins with a statement of the importance of pre-employment examinations. In addition to the general systematic breakdown, there are also considered: (1) Diseases and conditions due to various types of organisms, (2) External agents and their effects, (3) Nutritional and constitutional diseases and conditions, (4) Restrictions, (5) Tumors and cysts, (6) Medical forms, and finally, re-examination of employees. This material has been compiled on the basis of the author's experience with twenty thousand pre-employment examinations. It is presented in a form which can be altered as circumstances require.

This book is an attempt to fill a void which has been too long vacant. From a technical point it does so. Its very strength, its emphasis on techniques of measuring disability, is also its weakness. Used as a reference book by an examining physician or by an employment manager to evaluate the seriousness of any particular handicap or ailment of an applicant, it will serve a useful purpose. It will supply guide lines for consideration. If it is used as a Bible and is followed blindly, it will likely result in consequences which are disturbing to contemplate.

Little is mentioned about the attitude of applicants, nor how well they may have compensated for their defects. Concessions in accepting applicants with defects are made somewhat grudgingly. The book is reminiscent of an older philosophy that an employer is buying labor off the open market and is entitled to select the cream of the crop. A more current philosophy, which a reader of this book might not suspect exists, is that a cross section of the community should be employed and only those with defects which are more than ordinary risks to themselves or others, including the employer, should be rejected. Only in a market with a great excess of labor could the standards of this book be enforced and the employer hire enough help to operate his business. This criticism is not too serious, since the situation will be self-correcting. The young enthusiastic examining physician or employment manager will not long exercise this power of rejection of applicants to the unrestricted extent described before he will be "educated" by the management that the employer's first interest is production and if the medical standard set for applicants interferes with hiring sufficient help to meet production needs, the medical standard must be lowered.

One gains the impression that the examining physician

works in a vacuum and can ignore the employer's need for labor and disregard any social obligation to the community. The examining procedure is apparently considered as rigid and inflexible as the rejection of oranges in a fruit shed for failure to meet a color standard, regardless of how sweet or copious their juice.

That this impression is not inconsistent with the author's belief seems to be borne out by the fact that two pages are devoted to "The Pre-Employment Examination as Conducted by a Nurse." Regardless of the situation in other states, these two pages are a wide open invitation to the California nurse who carries out the prescribed program to invite the investigative attention of the State Board of Medical Examiners. Your reviewers were shocked with some of the statements and alarmed for fear the suggestions would be followed. Some of the statements in this section are as follows: (*Italics are the reviewers*) "Where such authority (x-rays, consultations, etc.) is not deemed advisable . . . the nurse should be *instructed to reject all applicants about whose condition she is uncertain.*"

Parenthetically, it is with some relief that it was noted that capable as she is to examine the eyes, ears, nose, and throat, that "the nurse should avoid the use of the otoscope." "The nurse will have the same choice of decisions as the physician medical examiner; namely, *medical hold, approval, rejection, or approval with restrictions.*"

The author admits that unless the nurse is authorized to refer applicants to an outside physician, the number she must reject will be higher than when the examinations are conducted by a physician. However, he finds solace in the fact that *around 60 per cent are physically sound*, and with this note of optimism, concludes that "*the pre-employment examination carried out by a nurse may prove satisfactory and is far better than no examination at all.*" To your reviewers, this seems like advising parents that dynamite caps may be satisfactory playthings for children and are far better than no toys at all.

The final word in this section is described as the proper guide for the nurse who is to conduct such an examination: "*When in doubt, reject.*"

Fortunately, most nurses in California have a high enough regard for their profession to stay within the confines of the medical and nursing practice acts. The California State Nurses Association has done much to educate the members regarding the pitfalls of practicing medicine. There may still be the unwary or inexperienced for whom this word of caution may be helpful.

This book has much to commend it. It is, however, arbitrary in the reviewers' belief and to follow it literally would be to invite embarrassment, if not difficulty. Therefore, if the reader finds himself in doubt as to whether he should follow its advice or not, he might remember the author's injunction to a nurse who is in doubt.

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